

# Nurturing the nurturers: Understanding support systems for early childhood educators in Alberta <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## Abstract

The recent Government of Canada initiative to create a national early learning and child care (ELCC) system recognizes the importance of accessible and affordable early learning and child care. The Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Agreement aims to support the 46% of children aged birth to 5 years old in Alberta enrolled in regulated and licensed ELCC services (Government of Canada, 2022). The Agreement is a \$3.8 billion investment in Alberta's ELCC sector. Its goal is to create 45,000 new childcare spaces and hire 7,000 to 20,000 new early childhood educators (ECEs) (Government of Canada, 2021a). However, concerns regarding workforce retention persist. This qualitative descriptive, community-engaged research aims to understand the factors contributing to the retention of ECEs in the sector. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to gain insights from eleven ECEs in Alberta about their experiences and perspectives on workforce stability. The interviews explored ECE's motivations for entering the sector, workplace experiences, self-advocacy strategies, and grassroots solutions. Thematic analysis identified five key themes of support: personal passion, pride, and professional identity; work-life balance; positive professional relationships; supportive organizational structures; and policy decisions. The participating ECEs had deep motivations to work with children and felt that their work with children and families was not adequately recognized or valued. However, they found the interview process empowering and stressed the importance of decision-makers understanding their skills and challenges. By providing ECEs with an opportunity to voice their concerns, this research helped them realize their agency and the importance of self-advocacy. The findings of this research have significant implications for policy decisions under the Canada-Alberta Agreement. They highlight the need to include the voices and perspectives of ECEs when decisions are made on their behalf.

**Related link:** Position paper on a publicly-funded early learning and child care salary scale <sup>[4]</sup>

**Region:** Alberta <sup>[5]</sup>

**Tags:** recruitment and retention <sup>[6]</sup>

recognition <sup>[7]</sup>

workforce strategy <sup>[8]</sup>

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